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Admiral Stansfield Turner

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De Pauw University: Q and A after Speech

ADMIRAL STANSFIELD TURNER: ...free men in free societies like ours, where you tolerate differing opinions, dissension, varying ideas, as you point out, in my view are much likely to produce good research, good analysis of intelligence information than you are in dictatorial countries, where you're sometimes afraid to express a view contrary to those of your superiors.

So I think we are ahead in many of these areas.

The lady in the center of there. The lady with the glasses on.

Q: I'm not a lady, but I'll be glad to ask...

[Laughter]

ADMIRAL TURNER: I thought the lady next to you raised her hand.

[Laughter]

Q: I'm a Purdue student from Lafayette here, and I'm honored to hear your lecture tonight, Secretary Turner.

I would like to ask you a question concerning the public opinion of the CIA. Do you feel that the CIA [unintelligible], since [unintelligible] our societies seems to be motivated toward a youthful society, do you think that we will -- that you can continue to win the trust of the American people over the way you're operating the CIA at this time?

ADMIRAL TURNER: I don't I'd be here if I didn't. I

think that's one of the reasons I'm here. And if I believe anything about my responsibilities in this post, it's to continue to bring into the intelligence community, and particularly to the Central Intelligence Agency, top-quality young people, and to give them an opportunity such that they will stay in the organization. It has, I believe, as fine a group of men and women today as any organ, any agency of your government. A lot of that derives from days in the past when it was much more popular to be in the CIA, when it had a more universally accepted reputation.

And we will be very, very hard pressed in this country if we cannot attract into and keep into this agency the same type of high-quality people.

And I'm very encouraged by the recruiting we have on college campuses, all of which is done openly, incidentally.

[Laughter]

We go to 130 campuses a year. And if anybody would like the recruiter's number -- and we're getting lots of applications for every opening that we have, and I think that's just fundamental to us.

And let me digress for a moment. We found it necessary a short while ago to reduce the size of the agency because we found there was still overhead left over from Vietnam. We had too many people doing too little work. So we said we'll eliminate over the next two years 820 openings. But I insisted that in the process of selecting the people who must leave we not select 820, we select 820 plus the necessary new blood that must come in every year if you're going to have a continuing flow of people through the organization at all grades. I think that's just critical. Because there's a tendency when an organization is declining in size, as the CIA has been for a number of years, to hang on to all your good people -- and most of them are good people. You know them and you like them and you're indebted to them.

So we've had to bite a very unpleasant bullet by releasing even more than was necessary for the cutdown in order to be sure that we had the promotion opportunities from the bottom to the top.

Q: [Inaudible]

ADMIRAL TURNER: To begin with, I'm not familiar with all the details of that era, but I would be inclined to deny your premise. I doubt that that was done, and we don't do it now.

Q: [Inaudible]

ADMIRAL TURNER: I thought you said the CIA was doing this. Now you're talking about the Soviets doing it.

Q: [Inaudible]

ADMIRAL TURNER: A CIA specialist on the Soviet Bloc has been doing this. You're alleging that but I don't think you're proving it to me. But I don't have the facts to refute it, but it doesn't sound like anything I've heard when I've read what I have read.

We have very, very limited covert operations today, and all those that we have are specifically authorized by the President and well -- I mean and the Congress, as well as [unintelligible].

Q: Admiral Turner, I'm Marjorie McBain. I live in this community. I have a question I should like to ask you inspired by some information from a group called Political Rights Defense Fund. This group pleads the cause of the Socialist Workers Party, which has been spied upon for 40 years by the FBI.

Now, I know you are the CIA, but it's very hard to make a distinction between the two agencies now. And since you are in a sort of an overall position, I feel free ask you what your opinion is in regard to this matter.

This party has a membership of about 2500 people. They have been harassed, their offices have been burglarized regularly. And as a result of this continued illegal action against them, they have filed suit against the government, the federal government. The government, at this time, refuses to come to any agreement or any type of decision in regard to this suit. The Socialist Workers Party is asking for the identity of 18 members of their own group who are in fact informants. The government has about 1300 informants and it has defended its position by saying that it cannot afford to release the names of its informants, because it will thereby imperil its capacity to act. However, these 18 informants do exist within the party, and the government will not release their names.

The claim is, of the Socialist Workers Party, that their actions are not in any way illegal. Over the 40-year period, they have never been found to do anything illegal. Their complaint is that the government is opposed to them because of their political direction, not because of anything illegal.

How would you explain this?

[Laughter]

ADMIRAL TURNER: I'd quick run out and try to find the

Attorney General, who runs the FBI.

[Laughter]

ADMIRAL TURNER: I wish I could explain this for you. I know absolutely nothing of the facts of the case, if they are facts which you have adduced here.

But I can assure, from what I know of the procedures for FBI activities, anything resembling what you're talking about, they are under the same kind of controls that I've been talking about with respect to the intelligence community.

Therefore, I'm shocked at what you say is in fact going on. And I'll make a promise to you to mention it to the Attorney General very shortly.

Q: [Inaudible]

ADMIRAL TURNER: No. Because at this point there are no Communist ministers in that government. There is no question that if Communists come into the governing bodies of any of our NATO allies, we have a security problem. And how it would be handled, I don't know. But as a former NATO commander, I did worry about this situation.

You know, I'm not taking a political position with respect to how the Italians should govern their country. That's their business. But I, as a NATO commander, had a problem of saying what do I do with this information if it is going to go to a Communist minister?

Q: [Inaudible]

ADMIRAL TURNER: Well, if I understand your question, I don't see evidence of the Italian government, under any kind of influence from its Communist wing, or Communist Party, taking positions that are inimical to the American interest or the obligations of Italy under the NATO alliance. There's a great debate as to what would happen if the Communists did come in and we had what they call a Eurocommunism government.

And again, I'm not taking a position on whether that's good, bad, or indifferent. All I'm saying is that my experience in the past has been the Communists act like chameleons.

Q: [Inaudible]

ADMIRAL TURNER: Can you hear in the back? The question is concerning the impact on our relationships with other intelligence agencies in other countries of the greater public scrutiny and the, sometimes, disclosures of our intelligence information in

this country.

Let me say that when we have a major disclosure of intelligence information, unauthorized, it does us severe damage around the world. It does diminish the confidence of other intelligence agencies in dealing with us. But also, more than that, in the spying business around the world we have lots of friends who work with us. None of them want their names to appear in The New York Times tomorrow morning, and many of their lives are at stake. Many of them are patriots to us, are doing things on our behalf at great risk to themselves.

And therefore, this tendency to feel that it's all right for every citizen to automatically declassify anything he finds that is classified can be very, very dangerous to our country.

I believe that at this time we are restoring that confidence, and I am working in two directions to do it. One I've been mentioning to you tonight, and that's the greater openness, the declassification of as much information as can be declassified. That's to help security, as well as to share information. Because if you have too much information classified, nobody pays any attention to it; they don't respect it. So, by narrowing the corpus of classified information, I hope to generate respect and better treatment for that which is left.

But secondly, I'm working very hard and taking even Draconian measures to tighten the noose around our security procedures for the very sensitive information, particularly the information about how we get our information. It could easily be cut off if other people know it. And we're doing things like reducing the number of people who are allowed to have this information.

I recently went out to the West Coast and inspected some industrial facilities and found their security procedures were remiss. So I blatantly threatened them that we could take away their security clearances, put them temporarily out of business if they don't get these straightened out. And I doubled the security force to go out and do those inspections.

We've got to tighten up where it's proper. We've got to release as much as we can at the same time. And I believe they're compatible operations.

Q: My name is [unintelligible] and I'm a student. [Unintelligible] ask three questions.

First of all, do you believe that there's a good possibility that there are current CIA agents or operatives that were involved in the Kennedy assassination? The first one.

Secondly, I'd like to -- If you can maybe enlighten us about our Intelligence operations in South Africa?

And thirdly, after obtaining this new post, how has this affected your life with other people?

[Laughter]

ADMIRAL TURNER: ...answer your other questions very quickly, the first two very quickly.

The first one's no, no evidence, to my knowledge; and we've done a thorough search of our files on any connection between the CIA and John F. Kennedy's death.

Two, no, I won't discuss our Intelligence operations in South Africa.

And three, I really should call my wife up to the platform to tell you how my life has changed.

[Laughter]

My life has changed since February, when I was called back from Italy by the President, in very exciting ways.

For those of you who are college students and looking to your profession, let me say in great sincerity that I recommend you give some thought to serving in your government, not necessarily in Intelligence, not necessarily in the military, which have been my experiences, and not necessarily permanently, but at some point in your life. Come down now as a summer intern in the CIA. Or when you get out of college, try the government for a little bit, and come back and do something else.

It's exciting, it's vital, and it's important. And in answer to your specific question, I've enjoyed 30-some years of it in the Navy, and being catapulted from that to this very demanding, very challenging assignment has been just most exciting to me. Because having our principal decision-makers well informed, be it the President, congressional leaders, the Secretary of Defense, the military commanders in the field, the ambassadors on their posts, is very critical to not only your future and mine and our country's, but the tremendous contribution that we can play for good in this world. And I find it exciting to be a part of that, and I hope that I've shared some of that excitement and some of that sense of verve and importance that we all feel in the Intelligence community, and which I assure you is felt throughout the governmental apparatus. And I commend it to you as a contribution to your country, a contribution which you owe to your country, because it gives us all so much. But more than that, you'll love it and you'll find it exciting, and if you try it,

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It'll be like I found it. You may not be able to kick the habit.

Thank you.

[Applause]